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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the rights of children, families, and society regarding the care and education of young children. The paper addresses two basic questions concerning what is meant by the word "right." The first question is, "What is right for young children and families in order to ensure optimal development?" The response to the question uses several definitions of "right" as a foundation for consideration of notions of what is good, proper, or just; what is in conformity with fact, reason, or some standard of principle; and what is correct in judgment, opinion, or action. The response is meant to integrate knowledge and experience about what is pedagogically and developmentally correct for young children. The second question is, "To what are children rightfully entitled?" This question focuses on what is morally, legally, or ethically proper; what is due to any person by just claim, legal guarantee, or moral principle; and what certifies privilege. It is suggested that a legal view of rights has framed child and family policy in America. The paper offers an alternative conception of rights that embraces legal and psychological dimensions, with the goal of improving the alignment between what is right for children and their rightful entitlements. The paper also discusses the process of ensuring children's optimal development; the process of realizing entitlements in early care and education; and the government's role. Sixty citations accompany the article. (RH)

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ENTITLEMENT IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION: A TALE OF TWO RIGHTS

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Sharon L. Kagan, Ed.D.*
Yale University
December 1989

"Head Start is an excellent example of what is right in our country. It is right that we as a nation offer and provide services for our children. It is right that the whole family be involved in that child's future. It is not only right but it is the family's right to expect it."

Hector DeLeon,
National Migrant Head Start Association,
Testimony, Head Start Silver Ribbon Panel, October 24, 1989, Washington, DC.

This paper is about rights. Fundamentally, it is about the rights Mr. DeLeon addresses--the rights of children, families, and society regarding the care and education of our nation's young children. The paper explores two basic questions, each centered on a different conception of right.

The first question asks, What is right for young children and families in order to ensure optimal development? Building on several definitions of the word right in the Random House Dictionary, it addresses (1) what is good, proper, or just? (2) what is in conformity with fact, reason, or some standard of principle? and (3) what is correct in judgment, opinion, or action? In other words, in responding to the first question, this paper seeks to integrate knowledge and experience about what is pedagogically and developmentally correct for young children.

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Moving from what is right or correct for children, the second question asks, To what are children rightfully entitled? This question is centered on "right" as a just claim or title and focuses on (1) that which is morally, legally, or ethically proper; (2) that which is due anyone by just claim, legal guarantee, or moral principle; and (3) that which certifies privilege. This paper will suggest that in America, a legal view of rights has framed child and family policy. It offers an alternative conception of rights, one that embraces both legal and psychological dimensions, with the goal of bringing what is right for children (the first question) more in line with their rightful entitlements (the second question).

ENSURING CHILDREN'S OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT: WHAT DO WE KNOW IS RIGHT?

Not new, the field of child development has spawned hundreds of researchers, many active professional organizations, and a variety of professional publications. Through the work of tireless academics, our collective knowledge about what it takes to nurture optimal development in children evolves continuously. But because research begets the need for more research and because social problems increase in complexity, definite conclusions are often more elusive than policymakers or

researchers would like. The nature-nurture controversy, waged for decades, is still debated, with renewed calls for investigations of within-family differences in order to understand the environmental origins of individual differences in development (Plomin, 1989). The century-old search "to understand the elusive phenomenon of human intelligence" continues, and new conceptions are constantly proposed and discussed (Weinberg, 1989).

Not only do uncertainties plague (and promote) empirical inquiry, but they also characterize some of the evaluation research regarding early intervention programs. In the concluding chapter of the February American Psychologist special issue on children and their development, Horowitz and O'Brien (1989) write, "Early intervention programs are fueled by a little bit of data and a lot of belief that the earlier and the more the better." While suggesting that none of the evaluative data is negative, they remind us that the data focus on short- and long-term overall group effects and not on functional variables that alter the course of development in individual children. Urging similar caution, Haskins (1989) encourages us to get beyond "research as metaphor for the real world" by determining why the long-term impacts of Head Start, for example, do not reach the levels demonstrated in evaluations of other model programs. Others share his concern about over-generalizing findings from one study to the universe of early intervention programs.

These are only a few of the unresolved dilemmas facing the

academic community, but they well illustrate that our knowledge of "what is right" is never perfect and rarely irrefutable. Conceptions of correctness vary over time and culture, so that when we consider what is right for children, from one perspective the proverbial glass of water is, and always will be, half-empty. The half-full perspective is equally compelling though and suggests that through empirical and evaluation research we have indeed learned a great deal regarding children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Furthermore, we know of various strategies and programs that promote our current conceptions of what is right for youngsters. Principles of healthy growth and development have evolved and we have learned a great deal about how to put them into practice (Zigler & Kagan, 1982).

Although the life conditions of preschool and kindergarten-aged children the world over--and even within America--vary tremendously, there is general agreement that young children, because of their physical and emotional immaturity, are especially vulnerable. This vulnerability means that all young children, regardless of country of origin, culture, religion, race, or socioeconomic class, require developmental nutrients in order to mature to productive adulthood. Although no survey of experts has confirmed a definitive list of such nutrients, most would concur that optimal development is hastened when children are assured of:

1) Physical health, and healthy and safe environments;

2) Enduring love and support from parents and family;

3) Support from other individuals and institutions;

4) Continuity between and among individuals nurturing children; and

5) Developmentally appropriate care and education.

Physical Health and Healthy and Safe Environments

Throughout the world each day, more than 38,000 children (ages 0-18) die from lack of food, shelter or primary health care; more than 100 million children live or work under hazardous or fatal conditions; and more than 80 million children live on the streets of the world's cities (Castelle, 1988). In America in 1985, our black infant mortality rate was twenty-eighth worldwide; one in three non-white inner city one-to-four-year-olds received no immunization against measles, mumps, or rubella; and one in every three children in poverty was uninsured, publicly or privately (Children's Defense Fund, 1988). Such figures seem even more astonishing because the data consistently indicate that impressive health gains can be made through intervention. For example, the Head Start Synthesis report indicated that children in the program had a lower incidence of pediatric problems than non-Head Start children and a level of health comparable to that of more advantaged children (McKey, Condelli, Ganson, Barrett, McConkey, & Plantz, 1985).

Moreover, environments where children live and play must not fall below a minimal level of quality if children are not to be

damaged by them. This concern is especially pronounced with respect to non-home facilities where children may spend much of their time. Although there is much debate regarding precisely who and what should be regulated, minimal health and safety standards do provide necessary protections for youngsters in out-of-home care. We can not regulate in-home care, but we can provide families with adequate information to protect their children from poisons, drugs, and firearms.

Enduring Love and Support from Parents and Family

There is no question that parents and family are the most important influence on the developing child (Leichter, 1977). Consequently, enabling parents to carry out their parenting function effectively must be accorded societal priority. This means making parent education and family support services available to those who desire them; it means loosening corporate policies to allow more time and less stress for family life; and it means respecting differences in attitudes toward parenting so long as child health and development are not compromised.

Recognizing the importance of the family to optimal child development, a variety of programs have been devised over the years. Documented elsewhere (Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd, & Zigler, 1987; Powell, 1989), such programs have emerged under federal sponsorship (e.g., Parent Child Development Centers, Home Start) and with voluntary, foundation, state, and/or local support (e.g., Avance, Meld). Though varying in specific

activities, such programs typically are devoted to enhancing parenting and personal skills. Not all have been evaluated and of those that have evaluations, many are not experimental in design. Where design criteria have been met, there is evidence that such interventions can raise children's IQ over the short term, but there is little evidence that the gains are sustained more than one year after the end of participation in the program (Epstein & Weikart, 1979; Levenstein, O'Hara, & Madden, 1983). Other evidence indicates that when parents are involved in long-term parenting education, their children are less likely to be enrolled in special education (Jester & Guinagh, 1983; Seitz, Rosenbaum, & Apfel, 1985).

Beyond establishing programs, recognizing the primacy of parents means that social policy must accord them ample opportunity to exercise choice regarding the care and education of their children. Parents must, for example, be able to say no to out-of-home employment without social or economic sanction. To make sound decisions--a challenging task for even the most educated parents--they must have access to information. For some parents, this may happen through structured programs; for others, through resource and referral programs; and for still others, through more conventional sources, including newspapers, libraries, and broadcast media. Whatever the source, ensuring that information is accessible to all parents and that all have equal opportunities to select options for their youngsters is critical.

Support from Other Individuals and Institutions

While parents have the primary responsibility for nurturing their young children, many other institutions, including the school, the church, the community, and the media, affect children's growth. This principle implies that in addition to the family's lead role, societal institutions have a critically supportive and collective role in nurturing children.

A powerful influencer, the media in general and television in particular exert tremendous influence on children's development. Television programmers must be sensitive to developmental needs of children by monitoring the content and amount of advertising, and eliminating violence from programs that are aired. Legislation like the Children's Television Act, that asks stations to document how they meet the educational and information needs of children, should be encouraged.

Children spend the greatest amount of time, aside from home, in child care centers and/or schools. These institutions must acknowledge the important roles parents play in the education of their children and create meaningful opportunities for parent-school links (Hymes, 1974; Seeley, 1981). Additionally, schools should consider taking on broader missions to meet the social, emotional, and caretaking needs of children. For example, while Seligson and Fink (1989) report a wide range in the percentages of schools offering school-age child care programs (from 0% in Idaho and Montana to 84% in Florida), concerns about latchkey

children are being voiced by parents, teachers and school administrators.

Always playing a strong role in the care and education of children, churches have been particularly hospitable to child care, so much so that a recent study leaves "little doubt that the Church is a major DIRECT provider of child day care in the United States" (Lindner, Mattis, & Rogers, 1983, p. 15).

Continuity Between and Among Individuals Nurturing Young Children

Another agreed-upon principle of child development is that children benefit if they experience a sense of continuity between (1) the time periods of their lives and (2) the spheres of their lives. Yet, given the increasingly complex caretaking and social support arrangements, such continuity is becoming more difficult to achieve. For example, maintaining continuity between the periods of children's lives implies linking the experiences they encounter from year to year. Information gathered on children will be passed on from one year to the next; curriculum will be sequenced and continuous; instructional approaches will be compatible. But as children and families move from one locale to another, from one school district to another, such continuity is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain, perhaps providing some justification for establishing national goals in education.

The need for continuity between the spheres of a child's life is equally complex. For example, as children enter institutional services for the first time (be it child care or

the schools), the transition from home to program is a difficult one for which parents and providers must be well prepared. All too often no one has invested the necessary thought and time to craft a smooth transition. Some school districts, recognizing the magnitude of the event, have created special programs and schedules to ease the adjustment. Once enrolled in a program, children, particularly low-income youngsters, are likely to encounter a myriad of other institutions--health, social services. Sometimes the services rendered overlap, creating duplication; conversely, services are sometimes delivered with no knowledge of other services being received by the child, fostering at best uncertainty, at worst costly and contradictory treatment plans and strategies. Coordinating institutions that serve children and families more effectively is a necessary but challenging social service task of the coming decades.

Developmentally Appropriate Care and Education

The large, though still imperfect, body of developmental theory and pedagogy amassed over the years can provide a guide for the delivery of care and education services. We know that children and families are extremely heterogeneous and vary on every measurable characteristic. Because of this variation, children and families have diverse needs. Such diversity, coupled with the normal "spurts and starts" pattern of development in young children, creates the need to individualize services. Group activities, more appropriate for older children,

belie sound pedagogy in early care and education and demand that staff members be well trained. Often considered the most important variable in the quality of early childhood programs, child-staff interactions must be finely attuned to meet children's individual developmental needs and to allow opportunities for child-initiated learning. Teachers have the all-important tasks of facilitating self-esteem (Stone, 1978) and self-control (Honig, 1985; Yarrow & Waxler, 1976).

Effective pedagogical strategies for young children must also recognize the importance of children's individual learning styles, languages, and cultures. Coming to a new non-familial setting poses significant challenges for a young child. When the language, culture, and learning styles espoused by the institution vary considerably from what the child has known before, he or she is seriously disadvantaged. A growing recognition of the need for cultural saliency, sensitivity to home culture, language, and learning style is taking root (Hilliard, 1985). Yet, a vigil must be established to assure that such commitment is not simply met by a "foods-festivals-fashions" approach to cultural diversity. A necessary first step, this strategy falls short of the pervasive need to realign institutional cultures to build upon the richness afforded by diversity.

On the other hand, while programs must accommodate and nourish individual diversity, they should also adhere to common principles. For example, from research we know that full human

development involves more than cognition: it incorporates and integrates intellectual, social, emotional, and physical domains. Thus services for youngsters must also incorporate these domains. Often easier said than done, such commitments to the "whole child" may contradict or seem irrelevant to prevailing educational priorities. Worried that this is the case in practice, developmentalists repeatedly acknowledge the inextricable link between social, emotional and cognitive competence (Almy, 1975; Biber, 1984; Elkind, 1986; Kline, 1985). Rather than separate entities, the domains are so intertwined, that scholars now speak of "multiple intelligences" (Sternberg, 1985; Gardner & Hatch, 1989). To fully incorporate social, emotional, physical and intellectual domains, curriculum and activities must be created to reflect this comprehensive approach. Furthermore, because young children's learning is not compartmentalized, and because they do not perceive activities to be science, or math, or social studies, a more holistic approach to curriculum suggests the integration of subjects around specific activities or themes (Katz, 1987).

Because many educational efforts have not employed a comprehensive approach, but rather have focused primarily on cognitive gains, "success" is often inappropriately measured in terms of IQ or performance on tests of cognitive ability (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Zigler & Trickett, 1978). Tests of such narrow focus are inappropriate because the attitudes and skills associated with school success transcend IQ and the cognitive

domain. Moreover, because young children's learning is highly episodic and dynamic, a single test (with whatever content) administered at a given point in time has limited applicability to overall school performance. But the current educational drive for accountability, rather than reducing the use of standardized tests, has accelerated it. Many contend such pressure has allowed tests to be used for purposes for which they were not intended-- program assignment and determining school readiness (Meisels, 1989; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1988; National Association of Early Childhood Specialists, 1987; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988). Such over- and mis-use of tests has had spiraling curricular effects, most notably the promotion of more highly didactic and pressured learning with less emphasis on exploratory and problem-solving behaviors.

This direction is especially disappointing in light of the fact that the profession has spoken clearly about appropriate pedagogical strategies for young children. Culling information from scores of documents and reviews by hundreds of child development and early education experts, the National Association for the Education of Young Children published Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) (Bredekamp, 1987). This landmark volume clearly delineates and justifies appropriate pedagogical practices for children ages 0 to 8. Adopted by other countries and many states, DAP has served as an operational benchmark of high quality early care and education.

What, Then, is Right for Young Children?

Taken together, we have a good body of empirical knowledge to guide the formation of developmental principles and the implementation of sound developmental practices. Refinements will continue to be made, but what is programmatically right for children is not a mystery. It is right that children have access to good nutrition and medical and dental care. It is right that children grow up in healthy and safe environments. It is right that their intellectual and spiritual quests be met. It is right that children experience the security afforded by loving families and nurturing institutions. It is right that child-serving institutions and policies be coordinated to ensure equitable access and maximum effectiveness. It is right that programs and services for children be well designed, comprehensive, and staffed by competent, caring adults. We know what is good, proper, and just; what is in conformity with fact, reason, and principle; and what is correct in opinion and judgment. In short, what is right is clear.

TO WHAT ARE YOUNG CHILDREN RIGHTFULLY ENTITLED?

On the surface, it would appear that if, as a society, we understand what is right for children, then the question of

rightful entitlement should be easily answered. Idealists would claim that what is right is synonymous with a rightful entitlement. Unfortunately, in most societies and certainly in the United States, what is discerned as right for children is an issue quite separate from that of rightful entitlement, the former being addressed primarily by the academic community, the latter by the policy and legal communities. In an effort to better understand and address core differences between what is right for children and their rightful entitlement, I now turn to a discussion of entitlement, focusing first on clarifying what is meant by entitlement and then presenting entitlement options.

Typically, when educators, particularly those in the policy arena, think of entitlement, thoughts turn swiftly to the operative manifestation of entitlement, namely federal entitlement programs. And there is good reason for this. Entitlement spending represents the fastest growing sector of the federal budget; together with mandatory programs, entitlement programs account for nearly one-half of federal government spending (Congressional Budget Office, 1989). Although many tend to equate entitlement programs with supports for the poor, such as Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and food stamps, Bell (1976) noted that entitlement claims by all groups in society resulted in a "veritable revolution of rising entitlement programs in the 1970s." Entitlements exist for many specialized populations, in addition to the poor, including the elderly (Medicare), farmers (farm price supports) and, indeed,

the population as a whole via Social Security.

Just as there is some confusion regarding who is entitled to government supports, a question to which I shall return later, there is confusion about the underlying concept of entitlement. Embraced in the concept is a subtle relationship between beneficiary and grantor that ultimately shapes the vision of entitlement. As might be expected, interpretations regarding the relationship vary and are reflected in the multiple definitions of rights and entitlements.

Legal and Psychological Interpretations of Entitlement

Like rights, to entitle may be defined as furnishing "with a 'title' to an estate...to give a rightful claim to a possession, privilege, designation, mode of treatment, etc." (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). By this definition, an entitlement is synonymous with a right; each makes a rightful claim. A person, receiving an entitlement, has the right to lay claim to something; in turn, that thing becomes attainable. Given such a bestowed right, there is legitimacy to the expectation that the claim will be met. Under this interpretation, entitlement is a legal right rather than a moral right, and as such it is bestowed from a rule (Hook, 1980, p. 6) and creates a convention. Legal entitlements give legal rights to individuals.

An alternative definition of entitlement is found in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1973). It defines entitle

as "to furnish with proper grounds for seeking or claiming something." Moving beyond the legal definition above which focuses on rightful claim, this definition creates a broader sense of entitlement; it includes both earlier temporal and attitudinal elements of entitlement. "Furnishing proper grounds" suggests that while the precise claim may not be present, the grounds or elements for making a claim --the precursors to a just claim--are created. Hence, in this definition, entitlement is less a bestowed right than an emergent possibility.

This definition of entitlement moves considerably beyond that of the above legal vision of entitlement. It encompasses a broader personal sphere. "Rights are entitlements to do, have, enjoy, or have done" (McCloskey, 1965). According to this interpretation, "an entitlement is a right which exists independent of the power or capacity to actually lay claim to something; it affords the individual or group the vision with which the goal can be perceived and, given the subsequent power or capability, ultimately realized" (Doernberger, 1989). This latter vision assumes that before an individual can claim a right, that individual must feel empowered and able to make a claim. Rather than a legal right that exists extrinsically, in this view, entitlement is an intrinsic psychological right.

The Realities of Legally Based Entitlements

Such divergent interpretations of entitlement not only are heuristically interesting but lead to very different programmatic

and policy outcomes. To date, our federal entitlement policies have been shaped more by legal than psychological interpretations offered above. Entitlement programs adhere to the legal interpretation and in so doing make demands on individuals: an individual is entitled to benefits only when certain criteria are met. Entitlement programs "are those that make payments to any person, business or unit of government that seeks the payments and meets the criteria set in law" (Congressional Budget Office, 1989). These standards are particularly evident in means-tested entitlement programs (e.g., Medicaid, child nutrition, earned income tax credit, food stamps) for which recipients must meet certain eligibility guidelines. Means-tested programs make up about one-sixth of entitlement spending (Congressional Budget Office, 1989), and non-means tested programs (e.g., Medicare, unemployment compensation, and farm price supports) make up the balance of the entitlement budget.

Although they are thought to receive priority, enjoy a protected status, and be difficult to eliminate once funded, entitlement programs nevertheless are vulnerable to political will and economic realities. While highly regarded in terms of their budgetary claims, entitlements may theoretically lapse or be canceled as legal rights to certain segments of the population (Schick, 1980). For example, as claimants for entitlement programs have burgeoned, so has concern about high costs and "protected" status. To offset growing entitlement expenditures, eligibility requirements have been stiffened, so that many who

had regarded entitlements as a legal right--a just claim--quickly realized both their ephemeral quality and the lack of security they afforded. Entitlement proved to be like the emperor with no clothes--robust in perceived power and appearance, but pathetically unprotected.

The Concept of Psychologically Based Entitlements

Moving beyond the accepted legal interpretations of entitlement, more psychologically based interpretations shift the focus from the practical to the possible, from "what is" to "what might be." Legal entitlement has its value; for better or worse, it is the accepted currency in this nation. Yet, as we have seen, it has its shortfalls--vulnerability, uneven application and access, and limited potency. Such shortfalls are especially inappropriate when contrasted with the ongoing comprehensive needs of children. For children in particular, entitlement must embrace both the legal and the more attitudinally driven psychological concept of entitlement.

Coles (1977) clarifies why this is so in his discussion of the potency of an attitudinal orientation toward entitlement for children. He suggests that children with feelings of entitlement possess a positive psychological approach to the world and its possibilities. Even five and six year old "entitled" children are confident about the future and their place in it. They are imbued with a sense of mastery and confidence. Not coincidentally, this sense of entitlement is found among affluent

children far more frequently than among poor youngsters. Coles's work may be dismissed as simply another voice among many who understand the relationship between socioeconomic status and life performance. But his message is deeper: for entitlement to work, it must offer not only dollars, but also the empowerment and hope that accompanies money. The message regarding psychological entitlement for individual children also holds for entitlement as a psychological concept. To entitle from the psychological perspective is to render a sense of what is possible. Although the legal definition of entitlement has framed the extant policy ethos, this paper suggests that a new vision of entitlement, one that incorporates both psychological and legal perspectives, is needed if we are to assure young children equitable rights.

The implications of a combined psychological-legal definition of entitlement are dramatic, reflecting nothing less than a massive shift in the way we conceptualize and offer services for young children. It suggests that rather than beginning with a piecemeal approach to policy, one that is guided by political and fiscal realities, we begin with a vision rooted in what we feel all young children are legitimately entitled to and then create policy options that reflect that vision.

The Rightful Entitlements of Young Children

A significant step toward that end was taken by President Herbert Hoover who, in 1930, drafted a Children's Charter that was adopted by the President's White House Conference on Child

Health and Protection. Consisting of nineteen articles, the Charter recognized the rights of the child as the first rights of citizenship. Broadly constructed, the Charter established rights that affected not only "physically defective" and delinquent youngsters, but normal children, as well. It specified that all children were entitled to health protections from birth through adolescence, to safe and nurturing schools and communities, and to grow up in families with an "adequate standard of living and the security of a stable income as the surest safeguard against social handicaps." Even beyond these provisions that transcend a legal definition of rights, the Charter accorded significance to the psychological rights of children throughout the document. These were underscored in the second article that explicitly called for "the guarding of every child's personality as his most precious right."

Widely circulated by standards of the time, the document was designed to elicit a powerful effect in "awakening the American people to the problem of childhood." Representing an expenditure of $500,000 which the President secured from private sources, the investigation and reports that accompanied the Charter were far-sighted in calling for individual casework plans for children that took the well-being of the entire family into consideration (Cahan, 1989) and for the establishment of family, district, county or community organizations for health, education and welfare with full-time officials who would coordinate with state-wide service programs. While magnificently articulating

the rights of children and providing supporting strategies, such visions, however well-crafted and well-intentioned, were never realized.

Dormant for decades, widespread interest in the Charter and children's rights is being renewed. Currently, a national Task Force on the Constitutional Rights of the Child has begun to consider drafting an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would grant the full rights of citizenship to children from birth to seventeen. In addition, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has developed a charter that was adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly on November 20, 1989.

Provocative in intent and broad in scope, the United Nations' Rights of the Child do not parallel precisely those of Hoover's White House Conference, yet both clearly reflect a commitment to move beyond a legal interpretation of rights. Both conceptualize children's rights not solely as an array of services, but as a force for empowering children.

Divided into three general categories, the United Nations' Rights ensure the right to survival, the right to protection and the right to develop (Castelle, 1988). More specifically, the right to survival includes the provision of food, shelter, clean water, and primary health care. The right to protection includes freedom from abuse, neglect, prejudice, poverty and exploitation, including the right to special protection in times of war. And, finally, the right to develop calls for the promotion of formal education, constructive play, advanced health care, and the

education, constructive play, advanced health care, and the opportunity to participate in the social, economic, religious, and political life of the culture. Making this list more robust, Americans might well consider adding the right to exercise options, to have access to high-quality services that optimize individual capacity, and to be governed by federal, state, and institutional policies that promote the well-being of all children and their families. Such entitlements reflect a synthesis of child development principles and psychological and legal interpretations of entitlement.

REALIZING ENTITLEMENTS IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

The issue of realizing entitlements for children in America is entangled with our national commitment to capitalism and national priorities that accord hegemony to protecting the security of the entire population over protecting the security of children and the indigent. For example, it might be argued that in a society as rich as ours, entitlements to children should be comprehensive, adhering to the U.N. convention and the extensions proposed above. Such a perspective suggests that entitlements should exist for all American children -- rich, poor, urban, rural, handicapped, non-handicapped, black, brown, white. In contrast, the reality is that 13 million children live in poverty in America, commonly considered the richest nation in the world.

Such a figure not only bespeaks the lack of comprehensive entitlement but may be likened to nationally sanctioned child neglect. The purpose of this analysis is not to debate the merits or demerits of capitalism or the "butter" vs. "guns" approach to policy; the purpose here is to try to understand why there is such a disparity between what we envision as entitlement for children and what we achieve.

The disparity between aspiration and service prevails for children of all ages, but it is particularly glaring in the case of young children (preschool and kindergarten age). It is to this age group, especially the three- to six-year-old population that I turn. As noted earlier, all young children are vulnerable because their physical and emotional states are not fully developed: they are often forced to cope with far more than their development state augurs wise. Moreover, young children are not only developmentally vulnerable; they are policy vulnerable. They exist in a policy and institutional vacuum. Unlike infants, the majority of whom are born in hospitals and are therefore linked (albeit temporarily) with the health system in a quasi-systematic way, or children in first grade and beyond who are linked with the educational system, children between infancy and age six are outside societal systems, suspended in a kind of systems limbo.

While outside the aegis of formal institutions, these young children are ensconced in and protected by the family. In fact, during the early years, the family is expected to assume full

responsibility for functions that will be shared later with society at large, most notably the school. Such ceding of responsibility to parents is premised on the deeply held values of liberty and independence. Parents have both the right and the responsibility to raise their children in accordance with individual mores, cultures, and values, so long as these do not violate the fundamental principles of our society. In essence, America bequeathed entitlement for children to families and in so doing perceived that it legitimately shed policy responsibility for all young children.

But not quite. Not all families were equally well situated and equally capable of meeting their responsibilities. For the handicapped, the unemployed, the widowed, the orphaned, the poor, and as Steiner (1981) says, "those who have stopped caring for each other or who lack the ability to care for each other," the bequeathed entitlement to care for and nurture children was turned over in part, and in some cases, in full, to the state. Rooted in a deficit orientation, entitlement programs affecting children were established as a remedy for parents who could not provide adequate care for their children. In essence, legal entitlements were created in an attempt to entitle all families in the psychological sense discussed above. But ultimately they served only to segregate families, producing a two-tier system wherein the truly entitled took care of themselves while others became entitled to government support. Inequity was the result.

Our varying ideas about the primacy of the family and the

government's role in early intervention gave rise to legitimate ideological debate about what constitutes a public responsibility and what constitutes a private right. The differences are reflected in the wide range of strategies adopted by the government for the care and education of young children. Steiner (1981) confirms the policy ambiguity by suggesting that we are unclear about what we mean by child and family policy; it is "a theme in search of a definition," a fashionable, crowded bandwagon whose "destination remains uncertain." Others contend that the policy process itself has exacerbated the ambiguity and fragmentation, with incremental, non-comprehensive change being the norm in our political system (Lindblom, 1959; Marmor, 1983). Whatever the case, the lack of comprehensive vision and political strategy has resulted in a fragmented non-system of early care and education in our nation (Kagan, 1989; Mitchell, Seligson, & Marx, 1989; Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). Inequity and fragmentation are twin impediments to realizing entitlement in the field.

Overcoming Inequity

It is no accident that following the preamble, the Declaration of Independence states as its first right that all men are created equal. Would it were that such commitment to equality characterized our services to our youngest citizens. It does not. Overcoming inequity must be the first step to ensure that children achieve their rightful entitlements.

For young children, little equity exists regarding who

receives services and who receives what quality of services -- frequently termed the "access problem." Services are rendered to children according to income. Children of low-income parents (who derive the greatest benefit from high-quality preschool services) are less likely to be enrolled in a preschool program than children from middle- and upper-income families. Fewer than 33% of four-year-olds whose families had incomes of less than $10,000 in 1985 were enrolled in such a program. In contrast, 67% of four-year-olds whose families earned $35,000 a year or more attended preschool (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988). The inequitable distribution of services widens the opportunity gap for youngsters from low-income homes. Not only do they not have equal access to programs, but their advantaged peers, because they do have greater access, are becoming even more advantaged.

Once receiving services, children face a further inequity. Federal guidelines severely restrict eligibility, so that most subsidized programs disproportionately serve low-income children. Such distribution of services tends to sequester low-income children in subsidized programs and limits the integration of children from all economic levels. More often than not such economic segregation translates into racial segregation, belying both the spirit and the letter of the law. It is interesting to note that America would not tolerate such segregation for elementary school children and has spent millions of dollars busing children to achieve racial integration. But such concerns

are barely addressed for pre-school-aged children, despite the fact that youngsters at this age are especially receptive to exposure to new ideas and peoples and that promising strategies to reduce segregation exist -- for example a voucher system.

For a long time, policymakers were concerned that subsidized (and segregated) programs would provide inferior quality of service. Recent data suggest that this may not be the case. One study that compared profit, private non-profit and government non-profit child care in one state found that government non-profit centers (those whose budgets were composed of 50% or more in state or federal dollars) demonstrated superior care and education (Kagan & Newton, 1989). It should be pointed out that the study did confirm vast racial segregation of children and staff, with government centers serving significantly more minority children, and that the study did not assess child effects. Another study, the National Day Care Staffing Study, while not discerning government centers from other non-profits, found more developmentally appropriate activity in non-profit centers (including government centers) than in for-profit centers (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989).

The equity issue raises serious questions for those concerned about entitlement. Under the entitlement principles outlined above, all children whose families desired services would have access to them. The free market system seems to be working fairly efficiently for those who can pay for services. (Certainly, however, there are gaps in some communities, with a

paucity of slots for infants, toddlers, and handicapped children.) But there are not enough subsidized slots for eligible children. Head Start serves under 20% of the children who need its services (Children's Defense Fund, 1988). If an entitlement structure were working effectively, then all children, regardless of income or geographic locale, would have equal access to equal quality services.

Further, if services to very young children were accorded the same seriousness and permanence as services to older children, then supports would be available to sustain the program. Regulations and benefits that accrue to the education system would routinely be accorded to programs for young children (e.g., state reimbursements for attendance, transportation, supplies, and services).

Inequity exists not only for children but for parents as well. While the concept of "choice" is being touted as a way to enhance school effectiveness, as a panacea for educational dilemmas, choice alone is not an egalitarian solution at prekindergarten or primary levels. Some parents have more information or easier access than others to information regarding appropriate educational options. If any plan offering choice to parents is to work, it must be accompanied by effective public information campaigns, along with the social and tangible supports that ensure equitable access.

Some parent education and support is offered now in the workplace: these efforts should be fostered. Simultaneously,

efforts to make such supports available for all working parents regardless of the propensity of employer should be a major goal of policymakers. It is a fact that upper- and middle-class parents receive corporate benefits at rates disproportionate to those of lower-income workers. Extending supports to lower-paid employees and to those women who elect to stay at home and rear their own children should be accorded priority.

The life circumstances of other adults, including teachers and caregivers, also dramatically affect children. But the already low-status of teachers in early care and education is precarious. With ominous regularity, teachers of young children seeking high salaries, better benefits, and improved status are leaving to take positions in other fields. And they also are moving about within the field to avail themselves of similar advantages. Overall, roughly 41% of early childhood teachers leave the profession annually. This turnover is devastating for children who may have to adjust to several teachers during the course of a year, and it presents real problems for the field itself--for example, constant recruiting and retraining, or having to convert full-day to half-day classes.

Such inequities for staff are the direct result of a lack of consistent professional development standards, a lack of common nomenclature that defines the profession, and a lack of agreed-upon certification standards. In one program serving four-year olds, an adult must have a B.A. to lead a class of children; in another program, perhaps even in the same block, an adult working

as a lead teacher with the same age youngsters will need only a high school diploma. And as there is no consistency in required training and/or experience, there is usually little consistency in salaries.

Why should there be such disparate requirements and compensation for adults who work with children of similar ages in the same geographic locale? Aren't all youngsters entitled to the same quality of teachers regardless of the setting in which they are served? And disparities in teacher requirements are only part of the inequity picture. Depending upon auspices, programs may be subject to very stringent regulations or to none at all. In many states, schools and churches are exempt from all licensure requirements, granting them, in effect, favored status. Often, they do not have to meet costly regulations and they are not inspected. Beyond tacitly condoning facilities that may be inadequate, such exemptions are unfair to those who must expend valued and limited resources to meet standards. If standards are believed to offer protection for children in some cases, why not in all?

The call for regulatory equity is often confused with a call for universal and consistent regulations, federally developed and monitored. This is not the case. For too long, early care and education has confounded its definitions of regulation, licensure, standards, and credentialing. Gradually, with the help of Gwen Morgan (in press), the field is achieving greater coherence in its lexicon. Licensing standards are those

requirements that must be met before a state or locale grants a license to a provider to practice early care and education. Because these standards are actually requirements, they must be viewed as reasonable and fair, and they must be enforceable. Fiscal standards, in contrast, are those standards that must be met in order for a program to receive money from government. Head Start's performance standards are an example. Accreditation standards are standards established by a professional organization (in this case NAEYC) and are voluntary. They are higher than those in the first two categories. Finally, guidance standards are those developed by experts for use in establishing other standards, as guides for practitioners, or as the content for technical assistance to states and locales.

The call for federal standards has reverberated throughout the history of child care and early education in this country, and it has typically fallen on deaf ears (Nelson, 1982). Geographic diversity, enforcement complications, and a strident anti-regulatory ethos have prevented federal regulations from taking hold. Nevertheless, this should not prevent parents, providers, and the profession from uniting in a call for common within-state licensing standards that are applicable to all providers, fiscal standards for funded programs and a voluntary system of accreditation. Efforts should be made at the federal level to facilitate the implementation of the above three categories, focusing on the development of exemplary guidance standards for use as adaptive models throughout the nation.

Overcoming Fragmentation

If achieving equity is the first requisite for realizing entitlement in early care and education, then overcoming fragmentation is the second. The discussion above has offered a glimpse of the challenges facing the field owing to its fragmented history and policy structure. "Child care" and "early childhood education," although pedagogically synonymous, have differed in goals, missions, and audiences until fairly recently. "Child care" was conceived as a service primarily for the children of working parents and often carried with it a stigma of mediocrity. The "nursery school" and "early childhood education" were seen in a more positive light and were thought to advance children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. While child care was a full-day service, the others were largely part-day, designed to meet the needs of non-working women.

These differing orientations were maximized by different funding streams and regulations and by little social or mandated incentive to cooperate. The programs co-existed but with relatively little communication and coordination. More often than not, acrimony surfaced when one program was accorded more money or another was successful in garnering limited and highly valued space or other resources. Over time, the result was an uncoordinated system whose participants had neither the will nor the expertise to work cooperatively. Services were often duplicated, and programs stacked on one side of town, while the

side other went unserved. In short, no economies of scale were realized; services were inefficient and insufficient to meet need in certain areas.

The hotly contested state expansion of early childhood programs in the late 1980s brought the situation to a head. As state after state recognized the need to expand services to young children, each faced the question, Should services be located in the education or human service sector? With little empirical data to guide them, policymakers listened to ardent pleas on both sides. There was little question that expansion represented both a confirmation of a job well done and an opportunity to provide more services, and, in some states, through revisions in licensing and standards, to exert considerable control on the future direction of the profession. In most states, the dollars went to the state education system, with some providing options for local education agencies to sub-contract to community-based organizations. As more and more programs were implemented, competition for children, staff, and space soared. Higher public school salaries attracted teachers from Head Start and child care programs. School facilities, once donated or used as Head Start's in-kind match, were reclaimed by the schools for their own programs. The expansion, rather than opening up the system, called to everyone's attention the acrimony and competition that characterized it.

Moreover, these tensions in the field have had serious consequences for the ways in which providers and professionals

think about and shape their respective visions for the future. Without commitments that transcend a given individual program, the field has little policy or advocacy cohesion. Each program advocates for its own expansion, but remains silent on matters of import to the field in general. Such uneasy links have prevented professional colleagues from forming alliances that could bind and build a profession.

The systemic fragmentation will be reduced only through a concerted effort, one that includes building in vehicles for collaboration at community and state levels, that rewards agencies for joint planning and training, and that provides incentives to reduce systemic inefficiencies.

Creating an Index

But realizing entitlements in early care and education will not be met by achieving equity or overcoming fragmentation alone, as much as these would help. Other measures will be needed. Bill Honig, chief state school officer in California, has suggested that we take the pulse of the nation's schools by creating a sort of Dow-Jones Index of education. Offering a variant on the idea, I suggest that we create an Entitlement Index in Early Care and Education. Like the Dow-Jones, we would not gauge our status by one company or program alone: rather, through a set of prescribed criteria, we would assess the field as a whole. The question to be addressed is not, what is the financial health of American business and industry, but what is

the operational health of American early care and education? Criteria upon which success could be deduced include:

1. How integrated are care and education?
2. How segregated are children, by income and race?
3. How much emphasis is being placed on adding slots without concern for enhancing infrastructural needs, including space, transportation, coordination, training, salaries?
4. How well are options for parents being provided?
5. How well are staff being trained? Compensated?
6. How robustly are children's comprehensive needs being met?
7. How developmentally appropriate are services for children?
8. How safe and how comparably regulated are children's programs within a given locale?
9. How meaningfully are business and industry involved?
10. How coordinated is the early care and education community?

Although perhaps not a perfect gauge of individual programs, such an index would yield a more comprehensive picture than we have now of how close we are to realizing our vision of entitlement in early care and education.

THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

As indicated above, the word entitlement tends to conjure images of expanded government involvement. This paper has offered two distinctly different approaches to entitlement, one suggesting a more limited legal (and conventional) interpretation; the other, a broader, more psychological interpretation. The issues discussed in the preceding section suggest that I favor the broader interpretation, seeing entitlement not as a governmental responsibility but as an attitudinal means for empowering parents, providers, and the early care and education profession. In this context, entitlement is more than a just claim: it is the means by which early care and education becomes a legitimate component of the societal enterprise, an entity to which all are entitled, should they so desire.

Does such voluntary entitlement mean that the federal government is obligated to <u>support</u> such a venture? Yes. Does it mean that the federal government is obligated to <u>fully and solely fund</u> such a venture? No.

Instructive parallels emerge when one looks at two other institutions to which citizens are entitled access--parks and libraries. Not unlike early care and education, each began as a service to the elite. Parks, originally called preserves, were preserved for the use of royalty and the nobility. Libraries,

before the mid-1800s, served the needs of scholars and the wealthy. As need unfolded and the social merits of these institutions became apparent, governmental involvement increased. Currently, the provision of parks for public recreation and enjoyment is a recognized responsibility of city, state, and national governments. Similarly, public libraries are regarded as a necessary community service and are funded primarily from public dollars. Federal dollars support local and state contributions to libraries and have been used to aid urban and rural libraries and to assist in meeting infrastructural needs for facilities, materials, and equipment. While all communities have public libraries, thereby entitling all to access, private libraries co-exist to meet other, more specialized needs. The use of parks and libraries, like early care and education (but not like schools), is totally voluntary. As societal institutions, they are entitlements, available to but not used by all. Nevertheless, they are supported by public dollars.

Just as it is not the responsibility of the government to fund every park and library in America, the federal government should not be in the business of funding all early care and education in this nation. It should, however, make wise investments that foster the improvement and expansion of such services so that, like libraries and parks, they are available to all who wish to use them.

In addition to broad-based policy support for early care and education, there are five specific roles that the federal

government should play in enhancing the delivery of early care and education services: (1) collecting and disseminating useful data; (2) generating relevant empirical research; (3) creating, evaluating, and disseminating information about innovative systems models; (4) seeding services where there are too few; and (5) intervening in times and places of crises.

Collecting and Disseminating Useful Data

Because early care and education is the child of many systems, the collection of accurate, thorough, and consistent data has not been realized. Limited codified information exists on what services are available at most local levels, in the majority of states, and at the federal level. Determining who is in need of what kind of service and what constitutes "need" would be tremendously useful. Finally, a national data base that delineated the availability of quality early care and education services would arm policymakers with information to justify policy changes. Beyond acting as a repository for data, the federal government should provide technical assistance so that data collection strategies developed at the local level would be compatible with those at the federal level. Municipalities and states would benefit from direct and indirect support in establishing cross-system management information systems to facilitate local and state coordination.

Generating Relevant Empirical Research

Individual scholars conduct useful empirical research that can be used to inform practice and policy. Yet often the research is small scale, of short duration, or methodologically suspect. Simultaneously, there are critical empirical questions that beg for solution, but go un-examined by the scholarly community. To address these shortcomings, the federal government should support limited empirical research on issues with pressing real-world implications. For example, additional work is badly needed on cognitive and language processes specifically tailored to non-English dominant preschoolers who are placed in English dominant classes. With burgeoning numbers of such children in our schools and early care and education programs, instructional guidance of this sort would be extremely useful. Empirical work that would shed light on meeting the motivational needs of urban minority males might help ease escalating drop-out rates and drop-down performance levels among this population.

Creating, Evaluating, and Disseminating Information About Innovative Systems Models

Generating new information and new approaches to service delivery is a particularly important role for the federal government. Historically, the federal government (through the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services) has identified especially effective programs and shared information about their implementation strategies and outcomes. Within the

early care and education field, such strategies have been very helpful and should be continued, with modification. No longer is the primary need discerning effective program strategies. Rather, the need now is understanding systems and discerning how to graft effective programs onto extant bureaucracies. We do not need more program models; we need help in transporting proven models to new locales and in developing strategies that ensure long-term viability.

Developmentally appropriate practices is a good case in point. We know what constitutes quality for young children, but throughout the nation, teachers report having difficulty implementing such practices in kindergarten programs (Hatch & Freeman, 1988). Assessing what makes DAP difficult to implement and disseminating information about programs that do it well would provide important support for the field.

Additionally, we must acknowledge that early care and education programs are here to stay, and look to showcase programs and policies that have taken the long-haul view, that have developed effective collaborative mechanisms, and that have found ways to meet infrastructural needs.

Seeding Services Where There Are Too Few

Throughout this nation, there are communities where services to young children and their families are so scarce that federal intervention is required. Communities where the economic base has eroded need special support, as do communities with large

percentages of low-income families. No community with need should be without early care and education and parenting services, even if that means the federal government's providing direct financial support.

Intervening in Times and Places of Crises

Just as geographic locales experience crises, professions or industries do as well. With the precedent of bail-outs in times of private-sector crises, there is little excuse to withhold support in times of crises within the human services sector. Recently, the existence of many early care and education services in this nation was threatened by America's major insurance companies. Concerned with the potential for child abuse and child sexual abuse within child care centers, insurance companies increased their rates significantly. Unable to meet the rates and unable to operate without insurance, many child care facilities closed. In such cases, the federal government needs to intervene, if only to investigate.

Currently, a similar crisis related to staff salaries is unfolding. Discussed earlier, this crisis is limiting the number of people coming into a labor-intensive industry, thereby threatening the very existence of early care and education services. Senator Edward Kennedy's Excellence in Teaching bill, if passed, will be a help, but even this is insufficient attention to a mounting national problem.

IN CONCLUSION

What is right for young children? To what are they rightfully entitled? The bottom line is that young children and their families are entitled to better, more equitable, and less fragmented services than we have delivered to date. They are entitled to options. They are entitled to hope and to experience life as emergent possibilities. That we question whether our children have a "just claim" to our resources is a telling indictment in itself. Paraphrasing the words of John F. Kennedy, indeed, it is long past the hour when we must ask what we can do for our country: now is the time to question what we and our country can and must do for children. As citizens of the greatest nation on earth, we are entitled to ask no less.

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